ALMS-BOWL OF BUDDHA FROM VAIŚĀLĪ

By

S. V. Sohoni

While dealing with some problems of Vaiśālī's history, I had come across Cunningham's account of available information concerning the famous alms-bowl of the Buddha, which, according to Buddhist tradition, had been carried by Kaṇiṣka I from Vaiśālī to Peshawar in the 2nd century A. D. According to Cunningham, later on, "The bowl was probably carried off by the people of Gandhāra, who emigrated westwards to the banks of Arghandāb in the ancient Arachosia, where they founded a city named after their original country Gandhāra, which still exists as old Kandahār at a short distance from the modern town of that name. They took with them, the famous alms-bowl of the Buddha and set it up in the new city of Gandhāra or Kandhāra, where it now stands, "in an obscure little Mohammedan shrine." The full extract from Cunningham's Report of Tours in North and South Bihar in 1880-81, is given in Appendix I.

Cunningham further noted that Dr. Bellew had described this alms-bowl, as "a huge bowl, carved out of a solid block of dark green serpentine." This description of the appearance of the bowl, particularly its colour, closely corresponds to that of the Buddha's bowl in an Ajantā fresco painting of Vākāṭaka period, which fact may indicate that the belief concerning this bowl, including the impression about its size and colour etc. had established itself in many parts of India at a comparatively early stage.

Cunningham has added, "The straight part above is carved with six lines of Arabic inscriptions, of which a copy was kindly sent to me several years ago by Sir Frederick Pollock. I forwarded the copy to my lamented friend Blochmann, but unfortunately it was lost or stolen on the way, and neither he nor I could ever learn anything about it. The inscriptions were of early date, as I remember reading the name of Subuktugin, and I think also that of Mahmud." The reproduction of Cunningham's sketch of the bowl, prepared from a photograph, accompanies this article (Plate I).

I pursued this matter of getting hold of the text of the inscriptions on the bowl. Through the assistance of Shrimati Lakshmi N. Menon (then



Pla. I
Inscription on the Alms-bowl of Buddha

Deputy Minister, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India) and Shri S. N. Haksar (then Indian Ambassador to Government of Afghanistan), I could get a copy of the inscriptions recorded on the bowl.

The text of the inscription, thus procured, is reproduced in Appendix II.

A translation, made in Kabul, is given below—

"The best of blessings and benedictions be on him——— The opportunity for the glorification of the kingdom was obtained during these auspicious days————most virtuous———the great and esteemed report————chivalrous————

PART I

————The creator Khwaja Ayyub Ansari, may God bless him, after the said honourable bequeather————from the reverned, in whose hands the authority rests————constructed it and bequeathed it for the descendents so that they may be the custodian (administrator) ———and supervisor—————He bequeathed it for the Mausoleum and for the school founded by the father of the bequeather and is situated near the said school———the act of bequeathing deemed necessary———situation in the Province of Kandahar known as Sang-e-Hessar at a place which was his property and had purchased it through a legal deed from the descendents of the late reverend Amir Nizamuddin ( ) Sultan servant of Maghfoor Saieed Shah Rukh Mirza for 1500———Mithqal[1] of pure coined silver. The entire village situated in the said province and known as Deh Roh Abad———the said bequeather———lawful sale ———mithqal of coined silver from lawful money———some of them ———and the whole of (Khajgak).

PART II

———from this canal, the said bequeather took water to that place and reopened it. And the entire of (Malkahah) was lawfully purchased by the said bequeather which was the property of Amir Jalaluddin Feroz Shah, the servant of the Threshold of the said Hazrat Sultan-e-Maghfoor and the entire village (Jak) irrigated by the canal and situated between Mamaind and Koshank Khod and the 40 yard long canal situated near Koshkan Khad and all the four rent free orchards in this village viz. (———) and Deh Zangi Abad and Deh Manjoosh

1 1 Mithqal=5 grams.

and (———) all the buildings which the said bequeather had constructed and (besides) the 86 shops in Bazar (Oshori) within the municipal limits of Kandahar near the said school towards its north and 51 on the eastern side of the said bazar and 27 on the western side of the said bazar———24 doors and 19 pillars. All the buildings of the Hamams situated on all the four directions of the said bazar and the inns within the city are included in the bequeathed property. And all that may be considered as part of the trust includes all that is attached to the Hamams and all of its belongings. The trust created for the bequeathed property is a flowless, sincere and well determined trust———like the carat and its grain———.

PART III

Should not be given to any one nor could it become any one's property in any way. The bequeather has reserved some portion of the trust revenues for the poor Muslims and the bequeather provided that so long as he was alive he shall be the custodian of the mausoleum and the property and shall make changes whatsoever desired. It was also provided that the most learned and the most pious amongst the male offsprings shall be his successor and if two persons be equally good in learning and peity the elder of the two shall be the administrator. If none amongst the male issues survives the administrator shall be appointed in this way. If no offspring of the bequeather exists the teacher of the school would be the administrator and if the administor has heirs (words——————————seems to convey no sense at all). And the bequeather provided that the afflicted (?) should be benefitted from the bequeathed property with permission. The income of the property should, first of all be spent on necessary works and repairs of the trust property. The rest to be spent on mattings, floorings and light etc. The balance may be spent by the administrator————that every 5 dinars should weigh one mithqal of the silver coin.

PART IV

Wheat @ 1 kharwar[2] should be the salary of the pious priest and the teacher who would devote the first five days of the week to teach and to have discourses on religious law. Every teacher would get a salary of 2,000 dinars and 40 kharwars of wheat and 20 kharwars of barley per annum (the words————————convey no meaning) 480 dinars cash and

2 1 Kharwar=40 maunds according to the Kandahar weights.

15 kharwars of wheat. Four out of the 13 high class students will get 360 dinars cash and 10 kharwars of wheat and the average class @ 240 dinars cash and 7 kharwars of wheat and 4 lower class @ 180 dinars cash and 5 kharwars of wheat. A learned Imam (be engaged) in the school for leading the prayers 5 times (a day) and be paid @ 360 dinars cash, 10 kharwars of wheat per annum and a caller (Moazeen) @ 180 dinars and 5 kharwars of wheat and a servant be engaged for the school and paid 180 dinars and 5 kharwars of wheat. This endowment to the school was in addition to that made by the father of the bequeather————. One teacher and students a servant to be present on the gate of the school[3] and paid accordingly———. These in charge of the mausoleum should perform their duty. Those who have learnt Koran by heart and those who lead the prayers (be paid) 720 dinars cash and 8 kharwars of wheat———. Each of the five be paid 480 dinars cash and 4 kharwars of wheat. The caller to get 120 dinars cash and 3 kharwars of wheat.

PART V

The bequeather provided that one of the students of the school should necessarily be appointed a librarian of the school and he would get his scholarship like other students. If any of the students stays (out) at night and if others do not the teacher of the school would accordingly————deduct from scholarship of those who did not stay at night. The salary of the water carrier who would supply water to the school would be paid as other servants of the school. The salaries of the Ghaloor Khana are as follows : The salary of an honest and pious Sheikh who is aware of GHALOOR and *conveys to the deserving ones* (?) is 360 dinars cash and 10 kharwars of grain per annum. The salary of the cook is 240 dinars. The salary of a Mir and a servant be 300 dinars. The Ghaloori to be held during the six months of autumn——— every day one Kharwar of wheat and 4 maunds of meat and 2 maunds of salt and 2 maunds of onion and 2 maunds of peas and 2 maunds of ———and 10 maunds of turnip———and during the six months of summer and———every day one kharwar of bread be distributed to the deserving ones and all———that is needed be purchased and in every quarter of the year 5 maunds of grape syrup and one maund of sweats prepared from ghee and flour and 10 maunds of flour be baked and distributed to the deserving ones.

3 This is the approximate meaning of the sentence.

PART VI[4]

"On every Id festivals to the poor ones of the school——the donations for the said congregational mosque——.

Inside the bowl, in a corner is inscribed a couplet composed by the scribe which denotes its date. The couplet is as follows :

His Highness the Prince, may be
Live the life of Elias,
Filled this stream with sugar syrup.
So nicely composed the Verse of date
The humble scriber *"the bowl of syrup"*.

Inscribed by Jalaluddin Mohammed.

It is more than likely that the bowl in Kabul was taken away from a large sized statue of the Buddha which was quite famous in its own period.

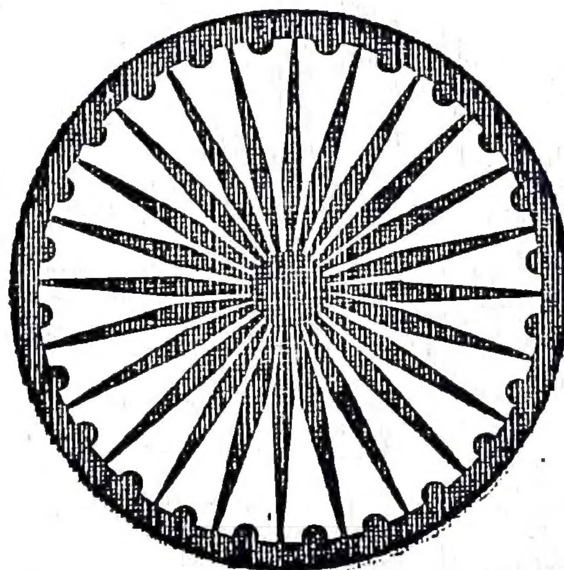
4 The text on most of this part has been obliterated and cannot be read at all and the meaning of many of the sentences given here are only guess work.

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